

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-05 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 NIC-01 AID-05 SWF-01 EB-07 SCCT-01 SY-04 A-01

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FM AMEMBASSY DACCA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5024

HNFO RUSBTA/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 2753

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

CINCPAC

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, BG

SUBJ: JSD-SPONSORED HARTAL SURPRISINGLY SUCCESSFUL

REF: DACCA 5330

1. THE HARTAL CALLED BY THE OPPOSITION JATIYO SAMAJTANTRIK DAL (JSD) FOR NOVEMBER 26 WAS SURPRISINGLY WELL-OBSERVED IN MANY PARTS OF BANGLADESH. IN DACCA ITSELF, IT WAS ABUNDANTLY CLEAR THAT THE HARTAL'S EFFECTIVENESS SURPASSED 80 PERCENT; DURING THE TIME SET FOR THE HARTAL--5:00 A.M. TO 2:00 P.M.--FEW SHOPS OPENED AND VEHICULAR TRAFFIC, INCLUDING THE UBIQUITOUS CYCLE RICKSHAWS, WAS ALMOST NONEXISTENT. GOVERNMENT OFFICES REMAINED OPEN, AND GOVERNMENT SERVANTS WERE INSTRUCTED TO REPORT FOR DUTY; HOWEVER, WITH ALL BUT A HANDFUL OF GOVERNMENT-OWNED BUSES OFF THE ROAD, REACHING WORK WAS A PROBLEM.

2. BDG HAD STRESSED THAT IT INTENDED TO PREVENT HARTAL FROM DIS-

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RUPTING NORMAL LIFE BUT IT ABLE DO LITTLE MORE THAN TAKE EXTENSIVE

MEASURES INSURE MAINTENANCE OF LAW AND ORDER. NUMEROUS JSD FIGURES THROUGHOUT BANGLADESH WERE ARRESTED ON THE EVE OF THE HARTAL. WELL BEFORE DAWN ON THE 26TH, ELEMENTS OF THE RAKKHI BAHINI WERE POSTED THROUGHOUT DACCA TO CONTROL ANY DISORDER IN THE CAPITAL, A PRESSING CONCERN TO BDG SINCE HORST SINDERMAN, CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS OF THE GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC, WAS SCHEDULED TO ARRIVE IN DACCA ON A FOUR-DAY VISIT AT THE HOUR THAT THE HARTAL WAS TO END. WHETHER THE ARRESTS AND THE RAKKHI BAHINI'S DEPLOYMENT WERE THE CONTROLLING FACTOR OR NOT, THERE WAS NO SIGNIFICANT VIOLENCE IN DACCA AND VERY LITTLE ELSEWHERE. IN THE CAPITAL, A FEW CARS WERE STONED, A BANGLA BIMAN BUS WAS SET AFIRE AND EVEN THE BUILDING HOUSING THE EMBASSY WAS THREATENED WITH BOMBING FOR REMAINING OPEN DURING THE HARTAL. IN OUTLYING AREAS, THERE WERE REPORTS OF FIRE BOMBINGS AND A TRAIN WAS DERAILED; RANGPUR DISTRICT, SCENE OF MOST INTENSE FAMINE CONDITIONS, MAY HAVE BEEN SCENE OF MOST SERIOUS VIOLENCE, BUT SO FAR OVERALL RESPONSE TO HARTAL CALL APPEARS HAVE BEEN NON-VIOLENT. IF DACCA OFFERS ANY GUIDE, PEACEFUL CHARACTER OF HARTAL MAY WELL REFLECT INTENTION ON PART OF PUBLIC RATHER THAN BDG'S POWER OF INTIMIDATION.

3. JSD WILL DOUBTLESS TRY TO CLAIM THAT SUCCESS OF HARTAL REFLECTS POPULAR SUPPORT FOR IT AND FOR ITS DEMAND THAT GOVERNMENT LED BY SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN RESIGN. IT IS MORE PROBABLE, HOWEVER, THAT THE OCCASION OF THE HARTAL OFFERED AN OPPORTUNITY TO THE PUBLIC TO EXPRESS THEIR DISPLEASURE WITH FOOD SHORTAGES, HIGH PRICES, CORRUPTION AND ALL THE OTHER SHORTCOMINGS FOUND IN THE LITANY OF GRIEVANCES AGAINST THE BDG. THE CHIEF SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HARTAL MAY PROVE TO BE CAUTIONARY FOR THE PRIME MINISTER AND HIS GOVERNMENT: WHILE THE OPPOSITION MAY HAVE TROUBLE FINDING COMMON GROUND FOR UNITED ACTION, THERE IS A WIDELY-HELD SENSE OF GRIEVANCE ON WHICH IT CAN CALL. THE QUESTION TO WHICH THE OPPOSITION NOW NEEDS AN ANSWER IS WHETHER THE KIND OF PASSIVE, NO-RISK POPULAR SUPPORT REQUIRED FOR A SUCCESSFUL HARTAL CAN BE TRANSFORMED INTO THE ACTIVE, HIGH-RISK SUPPORT NEEDED FOR PROCESSIONS, DEMONSTRATIONS, AND OTHER KINDS OF AGITATIONS.

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